FACT:
Signs that a child is being sexually abused are often present, but they are often indistinguishable from other signs of childhood stress, distress or trauma.

Direct physical signs of sexual abuse are not common. However, when physical signs are present, they may include bruising, bleeding, redness and bumps, or scabs around the mouth, genitals or anus. Urinary tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases and abnormal vaginal or penile discharge are also warning signs.33,34

Child sexual abuse victims often exhibit indirect physical signs, such as anxiety,33,34 chronic stomach pain and headaches.35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41

Emotional and behavioral signals are common among sexually abused children. Some of these are “too perfect” behavior, withdrawal, fear, depression, unexplained anger and rebellion.33, 34, 35, 42, 43, 44, 45

FACT:
Use of alcohol or drugs at an early age can be a sign of trauma such as child sexual abuse.22, 23,33,34,47,48

NOTE: Child sexual abuse victims may exhibit a wide range of immediate reactions, both in magnitude and form. Resilient children may not suffer serious consequences, whereas other children with the same experience may be highly traumatized. Some victims do not display emotional problems of any other immediate symptom in response to the abuse.

One of the most telling signs that sexual abuse is occurring is sexual behavior and language that is not age-appropriate.33, 34, 46

FACT:
Child sexual abuse reports should be made to the state’s child protective service agency, the police, or both. For more information on what you can do if you suspect abuse call the Darkness to Light National Child Abuse Helpline.
References


